

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Choosing Self-Hatred: How Canadian Ethnic Minority Novels of the 1950s Reflect Racist Ideas Propagated Earlier by the Dominant Majority Milda Danyte

Introduction

The process of transculturation, which Mary Louise Pratt refers to as a 'phenomenon of the contact zone',¹ interests me because both terms, transculturation and contact zones, are useful in analysing issues that have long puzzled me in my work on the early fiction produced in English by East European ethnic minorities in Canada. Ideas about transculturation are often made more difficult to apply in Canadian studies because this country's colonial history is more complex than that of many other countries analysed by postcolonial theory. Long after supposedly gaining an independent status in 1867, Canada still remained legally subordinate to Britain, with the approval of most British-origin inhabitants. In this way, when the twentieth century brought newer waves of immigration that did not belong to the dominant Anglo-Celtic majority, these members of ethnic minorities experienced a kind of double colonial status, with imperial centres both within Canada and outside it in Britain.

With the exception of Jewish Canadian literature, most ethnic minority literature appeared since the beginnings of the 1990s when the Canadian government funding of programs for writers and publishers that began in the 1980s finally bore fruit. However, in the 1950s, the transitional decade from British Empire identity to the Canadian cultural renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s, there were a number of novels in English written by second-generation members of East European ethnic minority communities or about them. One of these, *Mountain Shadows* (1955) by the Lithuanian Magdelana Eggleston, was given to me to read by my father in the mid-1960s; he said, in a half-apologetic tone, that I might find it interesting. When I read the novel, I understood and shared his ambivalence: true, Lithuanians were named as such, their food traditions described and Lithuanian words appeared in an English novel, something I had never seen before. Yet, as the child of intensely patriotic Lithuanian political refugees, the novel disturbed me because the references to Lithuania itself were scant and all were openly negative. Only much later, when I came across other ethnic minority fiction of the 1950s with the same undertone of self-hatred did it occur to me that Eggleston's attitude could be related to the specific status of East Europeans in the Canada of the early twentieth century. Then I began to consider how the transcultural process with its menu of values and ideas offered by the dominant to the subordinate could explain the self-derogatory attitudes adopted by these writers. At the same time philosophical studies about the Western creation of the animal / human binary opposition and Mary Midgley's notion of the 'human non-human'² helped explain the animal imagery used in these novels to describe East European immigrants. This led me to look more closely at the ideology and rhetoric of eugenics, taken up in the early twentieth century by influential spokesmen for the

¹ Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession* 91 (January 1991) 33-40.

² Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984) 109.

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dominant majority in their troubled discourse about East and Central European immigrants within Canadian society, and, as I argue, absorbed by the children of these immigrants and used in specific ways in their fiction to find an acceptable place for members of ethnic minorities.

In this paper, I examine the specific colonial nature of Canadian society in which the Anglo-Celts are both subordinate to the British imperial centre and try to constitute a national identity in which they become the dominant group for immigrants who are not British. Concepts drawn in a transcultural process provide an ideology and rhetoric of racism for the dominant colonial group, the Anglo-Celts, which they apply to new immigrants from Europe in their need to assert a more autonomous kind of identity. In this way, within the formation of a national Canadian self-concept, the new East and Central Europeans became a useful Other. In turn, the contact zones in which transculturation takes place are different for the Anglo-Celtic Canadians than for the non-British immigrants: instead of a discourse with London and Europe, the new immigrants have one with English-speaking Canadians. I leave outside my discussion all other ethnic minorities, including the French-speaking Canadians, whose path to national self-identity was very different.

The specific analysis in this paper considers four ethnic minority novels of the 1950s written by authors who grew up exposed to the notion that the new immigrants were radically Other, more animal than human: Ukrainian Vera Lysenko's *Yellow Boots* (1954), Lithuanian Magdelana Eggleston's *Mountain Shadows* (1955), Hungarian John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* (1957) and Scottish Luella Creighton's *High Bright Buggy Wheels* (1951).

Transculturation and Contact Zones in Twentieth-Century Canada

Definitions of the process of transculturation can be optimistic or, as in Mary Louise Pratt's assessment, pessimistic in tone. She writes, 'Ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.'³ Here the process of transculturation is conceived of as a one-way phenomenon, the dominant culture supplying the subordinate one. Other definitions are closer to the notion of intercultural exchange, as with Bill Ashcroft, who writes of transculturation as 'that mutual alteration which occurs when two cultures come into contact' and argues that 'individual cultures are never cocooned from the dynamic flow of cultural interchange.'⁴ A problem in Canadian studies with both definitions is that they assume a degree of stability in the two sides engaged in transcultural communication. However, in this particular case, when the trajectory of ideas is being followed over a period of time, first as used by Anglo-Celtic Canadians and later by writers from ethnic minorities, the fluidity of the Canadian situation means that the contact zones are not the same from one decade to another. Anglo-Celtic Canadians deal not so much with the British metropolis (they had formulated a version that worked for them at an earlier stage of settlement) but instead have to contend with the challenges posed, decade after decade, in the altered make-up of the immigrating ethnic

³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) 6.

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformations* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) 122; 24.

minorities that populate their contact zones. In the specific situation I am analysing, I follow Pratt in emphasizing that very significant ideological concepts and their rhetoric tend to move from top to bottom and that the 'cultural interchange' which does take place is far from being a dialogue between equals.

Cultural Discourse about Animals and the Human Non-Human

One major ideological concept that appears as part of the transcultural menu offered to non-British immigrants in early twentieth-century Canada is related to cultural discourse about humans and animals. According to many philosophers and cultural anthropologists, animals have most often been used in Western thinking to mark off the boundaries between what is fully human and what is not: this is a very powerful binary distinction in most Western cultures. Tim Ingold, for example, argues that the whole issue of drawing distinctions between the animal and the human is in fact 'a question about ourselves.'⁵ Similarly, Steve Baker indicates that the proliferation of animal archetypes in Western thought springs from the vital role of the Other that human beings assign to animals in their attempt to develop a clearer sense of human identity.⁶ Richard Twine states that 'the boundary between human and animal is in important ways socially constructed and historical and cultural variations may be noted.'⁷

Furthermore, animal imagery applied to human beings is often used to emphasise the distinction between insiders and outsiders within a society, as Baker points out,⁸ while Ingold reminds his readers that early anthropological studies labelled certain peoples as merely 'emergent humanity', societies in the early stages of 'becoming human'.⁹ A particularly useful term, as has been mentioned earlier, has been created by Mary Midgley: she calls the people who are stigmatised in this way 'human non-humans'; they are those whose cultural differences seem so strong to the dominant group that they are pushed out of the circle of humanity altogether.¹⁰

Anglo-Celtic Attempts to Form a Canadian Identity: The Early Stages

The rhetoric associating East and Central European immigrants with the brutal or disgusting features of animals seems to have been a defensive transcultural discourse developed in Canada only in the first decades of the twentieth century when such immigration suddenly increased. Earlier, Anglo-Celtic identity in Canada developed according to a pattern quite different from that in the United States. Immigrants from the British Isles began to settle in the colony in significant numbers from the beginning of the nineteenth century so that the North America that they encountered was no longer the New World of previous centuries. The British settlers came by ship and first saw the French settlements, already developed farms, villages and towns

⁵ Tim Ingold, 'Introduction', *What Is an Animal?*, ed. T. Ingold. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 3.

⁶ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993) ix-x.

⁷ Richard Twine, 'Human-Animal Relations', *Bioethics Today* (May 2004), Institute for Environment, Philosophy and Public Policy (Lancaster University, UK) 19 February 2005
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/b/bioethics-Today/Lancaster/animal/humananimal/htm>

⁸ Baker 79.

⁹ Ingold 5.

¹⁰ Midgley 109.

along the St Lawrence River, culminating in the city of Montreal. They then travelled to what is now southern Ontario, to land which had not only been surveyed but had a functioning infrastructure of roads, local government and trade with the Americans to the south. In this area Canadian aboriginals were settled in their own specific territories. Because of this, in Canada the powerful myths of pioneering struggles with nature, wild animals and aboriginals never formed in the same way as in the American consciousness.

Historians like J.M. Bumsted point out that the English Canadian colonies developed within an imperial foreign policy: from the point of view of the British metropolis, this settlement was necessary to form a barrier directed against the United States of America.¹¹ When it first began to offer cheap land in Canada, the British government was alarmed by the rapid movement north of American settlers, bringing with them an American ideology. A special campaign was then mounted in Britain to attract British immigrants. Among those who responded was Susanna Moodie, a middle-class intellectual who analysed her difficulties in *Roughing It in the Bush*, published in 1852, but describing the immigrant experience of the 1830s. This has become a canonical text for Canadian literature from the pre-Confederation period. For Moodie, the principal Other in her contact zone is the American immigrant, brash, rude and confident that British class values and manners are completely out of place in this New World.

From this point on until the middle of the twentieth century, Anglo-Celts in Canada constructed a series of national identities which accommodated both British and American features. The official and most often popular one was British Empire identity: even after Canada was granted a peculiar kind of semi-autonomy in 1867, Britain continued de facto and de jure to run Canadian foreign relations and dictate much of internal policy. Iconically, the daily reminder for Canadians of the British Empire was on their banknotes, which pictured first governor-generals and their wives, later lesser members of the Royal Family and eventually the monarch.¹² However, the banknotes themselves were not pounds but dollars, as already by 1867 the economy of Canada was embedded in that of the United States.

The degree to which British Empire identity satisfied the dominant Anglo-Celtic group in Canada can be seen by the fact that for many decades it felt no need for a Canadian flag or anthem, school programs in Canadian literature, Canadian citizenship or the legal power to change the constitution. It was only after World War I, which deeply shook the perception of British power, that quiet steps were taken in Canada to set up embassies and promote Canadian cultural autonomy. By the interwar period, however, attempts to proclaim that Canada was a mature nation were directed predominantly not against Britain but against the old enemy, the United States, whose mass culture, from chewing gum and candy bars, comic books, cinema and radio programs were highly popular products of consumption. The fact was that the contact zone in which the typical Anglo-Celtic Canadian moved rarely included anyone who embodied British power, but was crowded with economic, political and cultural

¹¹ J M Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford UP, 2003) 110-1; 205.

¹² *Charlton Standard Catalogue of Canadian Government Paper Money*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Charlton P, 1987).

figures from the United States: true transcultural discourse went on with Americans as the dominant group, the real metropolis.

New Immigrants, Racism and Canadian Eugenics

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the rise of Canadian national feeling coincided with the appearance in significant numbers of immigrants from East and Central Europe. Earlier, such ethnic minorities had existed in fairly small numbers and did not play much of a role in contact zones. Now, with this new immigration becoming a visible phenomenon, the rhetoric of nationalism became intertwined in Canada, as in many other western countries, with a racist ideology based on pseudo-scientific interpretations of evolutionary theory. In particular, social Darwinism and eugenics played important roles in new nationalisms; eugenics was the belief that peoples should be bred selectively as domestic animals are, and that policies ensuring racial purity are an essential foundation for any nation-state. The primary necessary Other remained the American, but now, within Canada itself, it also became the East and Central European immigrants and their children. Although earlier wild animals had not figured much as dangerous Others in Canadian thinking, these people were equated with wild animals.

The racist ideology that classified these immigrants as not fully human was not indigenous to Canada: it was a transcultural import that had developed in the nineteenth century in Britain, Germany, France, the United States and other countries; in the Canadian case it was apparently triggered by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of East, Central and Southern Europeans into Canada. Considering that Anglo-Celtic Canadianism was a fragile and shifting form of national identity, it is not surprising that, as in daily contact zones both ordinary members of this dominant majority and their leaders increasingly encountered these new immigrants, they reacted with intolerance and even hysteria. During an exploratory trip across the country in 1907, Rudyard Kipling, himself an expert on racial tensions in a variety of British colonies, was struck by the Canadian variety. The poem which he wrote at this time, 'The Stranger (Canadian)', ironically exposes Anglo-Celtic racism about, in his words 'strangers within our gates'.¹³ The phrase was adopted without any self-irony by Canadians to express alarm about the influx of new ethnic minorities.

Research on eugenics in Canada by Ian Dowbiggin (1995) and Angus McLaren (1990) has shown how, in the first decades of the twentieth century, those concerned with 'crime, intemperance, dependence, insanity and sexual morality' focused on East and Central Europeans as the source of these problems in an increasingly complex Canadian society.¹⁴ Dowbiggin states that this fear was connected with the belief that only those of British origin could be true Canadians: 'Many native-born Canadians believed that Anglo-Saxons were being overwhelmed by unfit social and national groups and might one day commit race suicide.'¹⁵

¹³ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Stranger (Canadian)', *The Complete Verse*, ed. M.M. Kaye (London: Kyle Cathie, 1990) 254; Kipling, *Letters of Travel, 1892-1927. The Collected Works of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: AMS, 1970).

¹⁴ Ian Dowbiggin, "'Keeping This Young Country Sane": C.K. Clarke, Immigration Restriction and Canadian Psychiatry, 1890-1925', *Canadian Historical Review* 76 (September 1995) 607.

¹⁵ Dowbiggin 607.

Reading the declarations made by politicians, doctors, sociologists and other leading figures of the period, one is struck by the frequent use of animal imagery to describe these ethnic minorities. For example, the psychologist Charles Kirk Clarke, after whom the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto is named, wrote in 1919: 'We are nursing a reptile that may easily prove our undoing when it is fully developed.'¹⁶ James Woodsworth, later the founder of the social-democratic CCF party in Canada and personally often sympathetic to East and Central Europeans, borrowed Kipling's phrase for the title of his book: he declares that while the Scots are 'thrifty' and the Germans distinguished by 'self-conscious order', Ukrainians have mostly bad features: 'Centuries of poverty and oppression have, to some extent, animalized him. Drunk, he is quarrelsome and dangerous.'¹⁷ Robert England, a school inspector of British origin who studied ethnic minorities in Saskatchewan in the 1920s, does find Ukrainians, for example, 'very industrious, thrifty, frugal' but still asserts that they represent a 'serious menace to our own civilization'¹⁸ and, in the opening chapter of his book, italicises an alarmist sentence: 'British stock is outnumbered in northern rural Saskatchewan by two to one,'¹⁹ using the breeding term 'stock' in the manner typical of eugenic rhetoric.

Eugenists did not merely study these human non-humans but also advocated restrictions on further immigration and the implementation of reproduction controls such as isolation and sterilisation of those deemed mentally and physically unfit. Mental instability was associated with those who did not speak English well and, indeed, as McLaren found, when sterilisation of the so-called unfit was actually carried out in Alberta and British Columbia, East Europeans in disproportionate numbers were sterilised.²⁰

Transculturation in Practice: The Movement of Racist Ideology into Ethnic Minority Fiction

All of the novelists considered in this analysis, John Marlyn, Magdelana Eggleston, Vera Lysenko and Luella Creighton, grew up in the earlier decades of the twentieth century in Canada, when the dominant group in contact zones was Anglo-Celtic and ethnic minorities occupied a distinctly subordinate place. As has been stated, in this period the ideology of eugenics and its rhetoric about ethnic minorities as 'human non-humans' was commonplace in official discourse. It can be found in public statements by figures who are regarded as progressive in Canadian history, such as the future founder of the New Democratic Party, Tommy Douglas; Canada's first woman member of the federal parliament, Agnes MacPhail; the noted historian A.M. Lower; one of the first and most influential of women doctors, Helen MacMurchy; and the premier of the province of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn.²¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that these novelists absorbed such ideas and images and used them in their novels,

¹⁶ Clarke, cited in Dowbiggin 622.

¹⁷ James S. Woodsworth, *Strangers within Our Gates, or, Coming Canadians* (1909; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) 40, 114.

¹⁸ Robert England, *The Central European Immigrant in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929) 88, 85.

¹⁹ England 6.

²⁰ Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990) 159-60.

²¹ McLaren 30-46; 121-2.

even though for the three of them who were members of the despised minorities, this meant propagating something painfully close to contempt for many members of their own community. In effect, the novels oscillate between celebration and denigration of ethnicity, creating a highly ambivalent effect.²²

When the four 1950s novels about ethnic minorities are analysed, it turns out that only characters who are members of ethnic minorities become 'human non-humans', usually through metaphorical language which links them in an unfavourable sense to animals. In all four texts, there is only one instance in which an Anglo-Celtic Canadian is compared to an animal, and this is neutral in tone: Vera Lysenko's Scottish schoolmaster Ian MacTavish is said to look like a fox.²³ To be sure, some animal images may also be applied to an ethnic minority character in neutral or even favourable terms: for example, bird imagery is used in a positive way to describe the female hero of Creighton's and especially that of Lysenko's novel. Creighton's protagonist Tillie is compared to a bird in her longing for freedom from her Mennonite community,²⁴ while Lysenko's Lilli, who has a wonderful voice, is repeatedly associated with birds.²⁵

Of the four novels that are under consideration, only John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* has been accepted into the Canadian literary canon. *Yellow Boots*, despite efforts by Ukrainian Canadians, has stayed on the margins of the canon, while Creighton's *High Bright Buggy Wheels* and Eggleston's *Mountain Shadows* have long been forgotten by critics and literary historians. Luella Creighton was both by birth and marriage a member of the Scottish Ontarian intellectual elite, not a member of an ethnic minority. Her novel has been included because her choice of German Mennonites as a subject was very unusual in the immediate postwar period so that it was interesting to see how her treatment of an ethnic minority might differ from those who were ethnic insiders. As it turns out, there are no really significant differences, suggesting that Creighton and the other three authors shared a common rhetoric in the 1950s about East European ethnic minorities which had come to be part of their thinking through the process of transculturation from the period when eugenics was treated as a serious science. The result is novels that, paradoxically, foreground Central and East European immigrants and yet continue to use the earlier discourse of intolerance.

To structure their plots, all four novelists employ variants of what may be called the narrative of assimilation. In each case, the protagonist is the child of immigrants and is already partially assimilated into Anglo-Celtic Canada through language and education. At one point or another, each rebels against family and ethnic regulations, though the closing episodes of the novels offer some form of personal reconciliation. Still, the conclusions of these novels place the protagonists outside the ethnic community and, to a greater or lesser degree, within the Anglo-Celtic one. The specific mode of attempting to escape the ethnic community involves choices of

²² Milda Danyte, 'Ambivalence about Lithuania in Lithuanian-Canadian Fiction Written in English', *Lituanus* 45.3 (1999) 33-9.

²³ Vera Lysenko, *Yellow Boots* (1954; Edmonton: NeWest, 1992) 5, 255.

²⁴ Luella Creighton, *High Bright Buggy Wheels* (1951; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978) 58.

²⁵ Lysenko 9, 31, 49, 216, 338.

careers, as well as, for the three female protagonists, marriage to a member of the dominant majority.

In all these texts the language used both by third-person narrators and some characters expresses powerful revulsion against certain members of the ethnic minority community. In *Yellow Boots*, for example, Lilli, the protagonist of the novel, is first seen as a child who seems to be dying. The Scottish schoolmaster Ian MacTavish says of her, 'She looks more like a wild animal than a child,'²⁶ though it is not clear what he means. The term 'wild' is used repeatedly afterwards to describe Lilli, first by her teacher and then by the Austrian choirmaster who falls in love with her.²⁷ What is odd about this rhetoric is that Lilli is consistently presented as extremely sensitive and not wild at all. Her so-called 'wildness' is clearly part of the transcultural discourse about Ukrainians in Canada in the early twentieth century.

In the other three novels, some minority characters are depicted as caricatures of the current stereotype of the bestial East and Central European. What is significant is that these feelings are just as often expressed by the heroes of the novels, young second-generation men and women who move consciously away from their ethnic identity, motivated in part by a revulsion against certain members of their communities. For example, the narrator of Creighton's *High Bright Buggy Wheels* states that young German Mennonites at a prayer meeting show 'common evidence of purity of spirit and vacuity of mind', while the English Canadian man who courts Tillie thinks of them as 'those black freaks'.²⁸

The harshest epithets are reserved for Simon Goudy, the Mennonite who is engaged to marry Tillie. His feelings for the girl are said to be those of a 'dumb animal obeying an instinct that was beyond his understanding'.²⁹ Gradually he degenerates into a true 'human non-human'; when he kisses Tillie, for example, the narrator's language turns him into an aggressive beast: he 'pulled her close to him with a fierce convulsive movement, pushing his mouth on hers until she could feel the shape of his long strong teeth behind his lips'.³⁰ Simon is also associated with the dangerous boar that later attacks him, leaving him without normal intellect but with a brute instinct to pursue Tillie. In one of the novel's most effective scenes, she has a hallucination that he is chasing her down a street. He is the ethnicity that she has denied but still feels haunted by. The novel makes it clear that, in order to bring out what is positive in Tillie and let her enter the Anglo-Celtic mainstream, she must marry an Anglo-Celt, while marrying Simon would have been a step back down the evolutionary ladder.

In Eggleston's *Mountain Shadows*, a similar kind of animal imagery is used to characterise the protagonist Maggy's mother, the chief obstacle to her passage into Anglo-Celtic society. At different points in the novel she is compared to a 'raging tiger' and a 'wild animal in a trap' with 'hands like claws'.³¹ The sense of physical revulsion in this novel is focalised by her daughter Maggy, as in a key scene of

²⁶ Lysenko 3.

²⁷ Lysenko 56, 61, 272, 315.

²⁸ Creighton 3, 269.

²⁹ Creighton 22.

³⁰ Creighton 217.

³¹ Magdelana Eggleston, *Mountain Shadows* (London: William Heinemann, 1955) 145, 159.

conflict: 'She [the mother] paused for breath, saliva coating her lips. Then she resumed, her voice dropped to a deep, throaty snarl. Maggy cringing, looking on in horror, didn't know which was worse, the screaming or the snarling.'³² Structurally, these equations of ethnicity with animality appear at turning points in the narratives, helping Tillie and Maggy move decisively away from their ethnic ties.

In a similar way, in John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*, the crisis for the young Hungarian Canadian Alex is signalled by the rising physical disgust he feels for Mr Nagy, the Hungarian businessman in Winnipeg for whom he works and who, for many years, he has regarded as a model. Suddenly Alex sees him as 'an old, lean and hungry wolf. One could almost hear those teeth cutting through bone and tissue, and hear them crunch as they bit into their victim.'³³ Disgust with other Hungarians and eventually with himself as he fails to enter Anglo-Celt society becomes Alex's dominant emotion, reaching a powerful climax in a late episode when he hunts down a rat in his apartment: "'Blind him,'" he shouted, "Blind the son-of-a-bitch" ... he raised the shovel and brought it down again and again until the thing on the floor was a pulp.'³⁴ He then feels ashamed, identifying himself with the rat, as he also does later in the story with an ant and a beetle. In this way the rhetoric of East and Central Europeans as vermin and insects is confirmed within the character's mind.

Nevertheless, a degree of resistance to this dominant discourse can also be found. The novels themselves are set in the interwar period when their authors underwent formative experiences. After World War II, though, when the novels were being written, a new Canadian nationalist rhetoric began to appear. By taking advantage of it, Creighton and Marlyn to some degree, and Eggleston and Lysenko more confidently, propagate a new definition of the Canadian national self-concept that has nothing to do with the now crumbling British Empire and instead proposes a fruitful blending of ethnicities treated as equals, something between American melting-pot assimilation and the later Canadian multiculturalism.

Lysenko does this through the plot device of having her hero Lilli become the lead singer in a choir that performs the songs of different ethnic groups, while Eggleston, whose novel is the most programmatic, has Maggie decide not to flee the small Alberta mining community for good, but to train as a teacher who can return to teach mutual tolerance to children of different ethnicities, including those of British origin.

Conclusion

These novels of the 1950s did not make fiction about and by ethnic minorities popular. From the point of view of ethnic minority readers, the element of ethnic self-hatred in them was not in line with the new ethnic pride of the 1960s and the attempt, strongly pushed by East and Central European Canadians, to establish at the state level a mosaic concept of national identity, eventually known as Canadian multiculturalism. Still, it was to take several decades more before the literary canon found room for ethnic minority topics. The Anglo-Celtic majority, which dominated the literary scene as writers, publishers, government funding administrators and

³² Eggleston 159.

³³ John Marlyn, *Under the Ribs of Death*. 1957 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990) 134.

³⁴ Marlyn 248.

readers, supported the Canadian literary renaissance but welcomed fiction that wrote about their own concerns and Canadian history: successful novelists of this period, like Robertson Davies, Margaret Laurence, Marian Engel and Margaret Atwood, wrote at first of the Anglo-Celtic Canadian experience. It is possible, too, that the eugenic rhetoric that underlies the four novels discussed in this analysis repelled readers who, since the revelation of Nazi death camps for Jews and others in the immediate post-war years, found doctrines classifying certain groups as non-human too patently racist. Furthermore, the contact zones in which Canadians lived continued to alter, as second and third-generation East and Central Europeans entered the middle class and even, to some extent, penetrated power circles within the Canadian metropolis. In the 1950s, with the mass immigration of South Europeans the more northern East and Central Europeans, by now long present in Canadian society, began to seem less alien.

As a purely literary phenomenon, the novels written by Vera Lysenko, Magdelana Eggleston, John Marlyn and Luella Creighton occupy a minor place in Canadian literary history: they did not start a tradition of such novels at the time and are so different in their assumptions about the value of belonging to an ethnic minority that they cannot be easily discussed along with the ethnic minority novels of the past twenty years. However, they do provide an interesting example of how ideas travel from dominant to subordinate groups in the context of postcolonialism. A racist ideology of a hierarchy of superior and inferior ethnicities, buttressed by the so-called science of eugenics, proved useful to Anglo-Celtic Canadians attempting to forge a national identity distinct from both the British and the American model, because it allowed them to position themselves as superior to the rather alarming masses of foreign immigrants entering the country. The same ideology was then absorbed and accepted, to a certain degree, by children of these alien immigrants who then tried to create a new version of Canadianism that allowed some members of their groups to enter the dominant Anglo-Celtic world. From the point of view of transculturation the result is not a happy one: the ideas taken from the dominant group offer too little to the subordinate one, and the writers' enthusiasm seems too close to self-derogation. More fruitful solutions to the question of how non-British cultures can be integrated into a culture that is still dominated by British-origin inhabitants lie further ahead. Yet the fact that these novels were written and published still attests to the growing flexibility of Canadian culture in the 1950s, a major period of transition.